



COMPOST TOILETS

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE LAYER - ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The compost toilet is a surprisingly symbolic, complex, emotional, and educational phenomenon. Water closets (WC's) interrupt natural cycles, pollute water, waste energy; if the water is not cleaned it pollutes local soils, waterways, and groundwater. Sustainable groups, particularly ecovillage communities, use compost toilets to transform their everyday practice of releasing human waste. Some are basic and functional, others are aesthetic and a real pleasure to use. Usually dry, organic materials are mixed with human waste to help it compost faster. Some compost toilets separate urine and feces. In such toilets, the composting process is even easier and cleaner. Separately collected urine can be used as fertilizer in the garden, being a great source of nitrogen and phosphates. Composted feces can nourish plants and build soil fertility. Compost toilets are therefore an ecological practice that touches social and cultural layers as well.

IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL LAYER



Toilet culture is one of the most individual everyday practices and normally “not for sharing”. Common toilets (either compost or regular ones) are a sign of willingness to share something that is usually reserved for the private sphere. Bringing up the idea of building and using compost toilets can trigger emotions and tensions related to status and wealth.

Some individuals might disapprove of them due to negative experiences (bad odor, discomfort, etc.), fear of germs and contamination, or lack of experience. In most cases, compost toilets open up a large field of opportunity for individual and group growth. Individuals have to re-evaluate their own principles and investigate how far they are willing to go to change their behavioral patterns.



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IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY LAYER

Sharing an innovative toilet culture is a great opportunity for community building. The group needs to find answers to many questions: Who will create the system? Where to place it? How will the system be taken care of? How aesthetic and comfortable do people want it to be? How much can it cost? etc. This is a chance to practice negotiation and decision-making. When a group is starting in the countryside or suburbs, compost toilets can act as an indicator of whether the group is ready to address ecological and collective issues.



In some ways, it demonstrates the readiness of people, to put it bluntly, “to own their own shit and work with it”. Compost toilets exemplify the shift from being consumers to finding more sustainable solutions - in every part of! – our lives.

INTENTIONS THAT INFLUENCE PRACTICE

Building a compost toilet is a design challenge in a society where WC is the norm. At the same time, it is a relatively small space where limitless creativity can be expressed. A well-designed and well-functioning compost toilet is one of the most ecological and elegant solutions to prevent wasting water, lower expenses, produce excellent fertilizer, etc. Creating healthier lifestyles with simple solutions like compost toilets demonstrates an intention of establishing alternative, efficient and sustainable solutions, valuing waste as a resource, and examining everyday practices for their ecological footprint; Furthermore, toilet facilities give a first-hand impression of the group to visitors. Are toilet facilities collective or individual? Does the community have compost toilets? Are toilet facilities given attention and care? Have these aspects generally been thought of, in the overall design of the place?



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THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURE



If the compost toilet is self-built, this is an example of making the dream and design a reality. It involves doing something real and tangible together; obtaining and preparing materials, laying the foundation, building the framework, thrones, roof, walls, and making it beautiful, unleashing creativity in a community effort.

After the building is completed, it is time for celebration, feedback, and harvest of learnings. If looked upon from this angle, a compost toilet is a good exercise in the Dragon Dreaming project cycle – dreaming, planning, doing, and celebrating. So to grow as a group while doing something tangible design and build a compost toilet together! Once it is built, create all the necessary structures to maintain it, process urine and composted feces appropriately, use them in farming and enjoy the harvest.

SUMMING UP

To sum up, the practice of having compost toilets in a community touch upon many layers:

- The social dimension, by sharing toilet culture as a community.
- The ecological dimension, with the advantage of saving water and producing fertilizer
- The economical dimension by closing the circle of the flow of organic material, utilizing “waste”, saving by sharing
- The cultural dimension by adding value to the end of the cycle of food, bringing in aesthetic features, transforming the prevailing “rituals” of toilet culture, etc.